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## A BIOGRAPHIC CLINIC ON TCHAIKOVSKY.

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"NERVOUS tension," "nervous irritability," "depression," "illness," and such terms, are constantly met in the biography and letters of Tchaikovsky. That these symptoms began to appear early in his life, and were always connected with study, school-life, or literary work, may be seen by the following quotations:<sup>1</sup>

This nervous tension began to be apparent, not only in his pallor and emaciation, but in frequent ailments that kept him from school. There was also a moral reaction, and the boy became capricious, irritable and unlike his former self. (Biog. 8.)

Peter's nervous irritability was much increased by the illness, and the doctors believed he was suffering from some spinal trouble. All work was forbidden, and the invalid rested for six months. After a time, quiet and freedom from lessons improved the boy's physical health, but his moral character did not entirely regain its former cheerful serenity. The wound was healed, but the scar remained. (Biog. 9.)

The change from St. Petersburg, while it proved beneficial to Peter's health, did not cure his indolence, capriciousness and irritability. (Biog. 10.)

His parents did nothing, however, to further his musical education, partly because they were afraid of a return of his nervous disorder. (Biog. 10.)

When one seeks the data for a biographic clinic upon a patient, it seems at first glance that there is such a dearth and inexactness in the hints given that the results must be too vague and

<sup>1</sup> The numbers following the quotations indicate the patient's age.

unscientific to yield an undoubted diagnosis. The untruth of the criticism, however, is turned to surprise when it is found that in a score of such cases the patients suffer in the same ways; that although unknown to each other, they express themselves in almost the same terms; that their physicians could not guess what ailed them, nor how to cure them; that the disease kept on despite all the "cures," drugs, dietaries, journeyings and spas, ordered by the physicians; and that unconsciously the sole relief (never permanent cure) was by one common procedure. We feel sorry that Tchaikovsky destroyed those diaries which would have made conviction more certain, and yet, putting the composite photographs of the score of cases on the same plate, they cover and reinforce the lineaments and expressions as if but one sitter were present. Then when the reader is a modern physician, who has seen a thousand identical cases in his daily practice, and has cured them, there remains no scintilla of doubt as to what was the essential cause and nature of the single disease with which the dead patients were tormented.

The cause that produced Tchaikovsky's "nervousness," "irritability," "tension," "illness," "spinal trouble," etc., when he was eight, nine and ten years of age, and forced him to stop study, and his musical education, grows more and more evident to the reader in the history of the following years. When he was twenty-six, he had "a terrible nervous breakdown" (the term is as common and as senseless now as it was fifty years ago), he "narrowly escaped madness," — all caused by composition at night.

By 1875 the chronic malady had made considerable progress. It did not return at intervals as heretofore, but had become a constant trouble. According to

his own account, he was depressed all the winter, sometimes to the verge of despair. He felt he had reached a turning-point in his existence, similar to that in the sixties. (Biog. 35.)

Tchaikovsky's health broke down. According to a telegram which he sent to Petersburg, he left Moscow suddenly on Sept. 24 (Oct. 6), in a condition bordering upon insanity. (Biog. 37.)

The mental and moral disorder which attacked Tchaikovsky during the course of this season, and gradually took firmer hold upon him, until in 1877 it reached a terrible crisis which nearly proved fatal to his existence. (Biog. 37.)

Anatol says that his brother was scarcely recognizable when he met him on the platform of the Nicholas Station in Petersburg; his face had entirely changed in the course of a month. From the station he was taken to the nearest hotel, where, after a violent nervous crisis, he became unconscious, in which state he remained for forty-eight hours. When this crisis was over, the doctors ordered a complete change of life and scene as the sole chance of recovery. (37.)

I am still quite a sick man. I cannot bear the least noise as yet. Yesterday in Florence, and to-day in Rome, every vehicle that rolled by threw me into an insane rage; every sound, every cry exasperated my nerves. (Biog. 37.)

The dangerous crisis in his illness was over and a slow convalescence began. (Biog. 37.)

I am ill, mentally and physically; just now I could not live in any situation in which I had to be busy, agitated and conspicuously before the world. (38.)

There were moments when I experienced such a complete loss of strength that I feared for my life. (49.)

From the 1st to the 19th of November I endured martyrdom, and I am still marvelling how I lived through it all. (49.)

"Curious fact," he remarks in his diary, "I seek solitude, and suffer when I have found it." In this state of fluctuation between *bad* and *worse* Tchaikovsky had spent his time since he left Russia. (Biog. 49.)

Every careful oculist has found that his patients report that their headaches, nervousness, irritability, dyspepsia, catarrh of the stomach, "migraine," sick headache, insomnia, depression of spirits, etc., depend upon the use of their eyes in reading, writing, sewing, and other kinds of "near-work." In every one of the twenty cases studied in the *Biographic Clinics* I have reported, the same cause of suffering has been overwhelmingly evident. In that of Tchaikovsky the proofs are abundant. For instance:

He began this work in Moscow during the spring, and it was the cause of his nervous disorders and numerous sleepless nights. These difficulties were partly caused by his want of experience in composition, and partly by his habit of working by night as well as by day. At the end of June he had a terrible nervous breakdown, and the doctor who was called in to see him declared he had narrowly escaped madness, and that his condition was very serious. The most alarming symptoms of the illness were his hallucinations and a constant feeling of dread. That he suffered intensely is evident from the fact that he never again attempted to work through the night. (26.)

This feverish work told upon Tchaikovsky's nerves. His health was so far impaired that he gradually lost strength, until he became quite exhausted and the doctor ordered him to the seaside, or to an inland watering-place, enjoining absolute repose. (Biog. 29.)

The composer's melancholy became a shade darker. "I just idle away the time cruelly," he writes, "and my opera, *The Oprichnik*, has come to a standstill at the first chorus." (Biog. 30.)

At the present moment I am absorbed in the symphony I began during the winter. Add to this, I am in a very nervous, worried and irritable state, highly unfavorable to composition, and even my symphony suffers in consequence. (37.)

I was horribly out of spirits all the time I was composing this symphony last winter. (38.)



On Aug. 7 Tchaikovsky finished the third act of *The Maid of Orleans* and, suffering from physical and nervous exhaustion, left Kamenka for Simaki. (Biog. 37.)

It is my chief anxiety to write more easily and simply as time goes on, and the more I try, the worse I succeed! It is dreadful! (39.)

I am very tired after my day's work. To-day I wrote the love duet in the second act, and it is very complicated, so that at the present moment my brain works with difficulty. I jumped from the first scene of the third act to the fourth, because it is not so easy and I wanted to get the most difficult scene — between Lionel and Joan — off my mind. On the whole I am pleased with myself, but feel rather exhausted. (39.)

To squeeze music out of one's brain every day for ten weeks is indeed an exhausting process. (39.)

... the resolve which already existed in his inmost heart, never to return to his old way of life. He attributed this dislike of his former existence to his ill-health, and cherished the hope that the ideal conditions of his life abroad would restore his nerves and soothe his irritability; he was convinced that he would completely recover and took up his professorship once more with a stout heart. (Biog. 38.)

But it proved otherwise. From the month of January, when he was able to arrange his life as he pleased, when, with improved health, the desire to compose awoke once more — from the moment, in fact, in which his real recovery began — life in Moscow seemed to him to be more dreadful and impossible. (Biog. 39.)

*Mazeppa* creeps along tortoise-fashion, although I work at it daily for several hours. I cannot understand why I am so changed in this respect. At first I feared it was the loss of power that comes with advancing years. (42.)

It now takes me three days to orchestrate a thing that I could formerly have finished in one. (42.)

This undefinable, horrible, torturing malady which declares itself in the fact that I cannot live a day, or an hour, in either of the Russian capitals without

suffering, will perhaps be explained to me in some better world. (42.)

The Valse gives me infinite trouble. I am growing old. (44.)

After dinner I squeezed the unsuccessful movement out of my head. What does it mean? I now work with such difficulty. Am I really growing old? (44.)

On returning from a journey he invariably began with his correspondence, which, next to proof-correcting, he found the most unpleasant work. In the nineties his correspondence had attained such volume that Tchaikovsky was frequently engaged upon it from morning till night and often answered thirty letters a day. (Biog. 45.)

A few weeks ago I accidentally took up his *Germinal*, began to read it, got interested and only finished it late at night. I was so upset that I had palpitation and sleep was impossible. Next day I was quite ill. (45.)

My age — although not very advanced — begins to tell. I get very tired now, and can no longer play or read at night as I used. (48.)

I enjoyed writing the first movement, whereas the others were the outcome of strenuous effort, in consequence of which — as far as I remember — I felt quite ill for a time. (48.)

For a long time past letter-writing had ceased to be a pleasant duty; still, it remained a *duty*, which he could only neglect under special circumstances. (Biog. 49.)

Just two months ago I began the composition of the opera. To-day I finished the pianoforte score of the second act. This is to me the most dreadful and nerve-exasperating occupation. I believe my ill-health is simply the result of this confounded work. Nazar says I have very much altered the last week or two, and have been in a dreadful state of mind. Whether it is that the worst and most wearisome part of my work is nearing an end, or that the weather is finer, I cannot say, but since yesterday I feel much better. (50.)

My brain is empty; I have not the least pleasure in work. *Hamlet* oppresses me terribly. (51.)

I finished the sketch of the ballet yesterday. You will remember my boasting when you were here that I should get it done in about five days. But I have taken at least a fortnight. Yes, the old fellow is getting worn out. Not only is his hair turning white as snow and beginning to fall, not only is he losing his teeth, not only do his eyes grow weaker and get tired sooner, not only do his feet begin to drag — but he is growing less capable of accomplishing anything. (51.)

Just now I am busy looking through the pianoforte score of *Iolanthe*. It bothers and annoys me indescribably. Before I went abroad in May I had sketched the first movement and finale of a symphony. Abroad it did not progress in the least, and now I have no time for it. (52.)

Tchaikovsky so often speaks in his letters of his dislike to this kind of work (corrections of orchestral score) that he must have needed extraordinary self-abnegation to take this heavy burden upon his shoulders. (Biog. 52.)

At last, at the very end of August, the vast accumulation of proof-correcting was finished, which, as he himself said, would have almost driven him out of his mind, but for his regular and healthy way of life. (Biog. 52.)

His persistent use of minor keys — the vehicle of doubt, aspiration, longing, morbidly self-bounded thoughts. (Mason.)

Despite his everlasting journeyings and walking, there was a solid basis of eye-labor and accomplished work in Tchaikovsky's life;

A glance at the number of his works, which reaches seventy-six, including ten operas and three ballets; at his letters (I possess, in all, four thousand); at his literary work (sixty-one articles); at his translations and arrangements, and his ten years' teaching, will suffice to convince the most skeptical that his nature knew no moods of *dolce far niente*. (Laroche.)

It appears strange that the sufferer should so persistently see that his "ill-health was the result of his confounded work," and still not recognize its connection with ocular labor; but to-day both the public and the profession still stick fast in the same error of observation and logic; both continue to attribute the morbid results to "brain-fag," "intellectual labor," and all the rest, oblivious of the fact that intellectual labor does not exhaust and that the function of the eye, the most important, complex and delicate of all the organs of the body, is forgotten.

What then shall be said of the obverse of the fact — the ever-freshly illustrated truth, that ocular rest, or walking, journeying, country life, living out of doors, etc., are the sole but certain means of getting relief from the suffering due to near-work with the eyes? As with others, so with Tchaikovsky, winter and bad weather, which confined him to the house and compelled greater use of the eyes at near range, increased all sorts of misery and ill-helath, while spring and summer and a warmer climate (especially in the Russias) at once brought health and happiness. Note the proofs of this clinical experience in Tchaikovsky's case:

Before the summer holidays came, Tchaikovsky's health was in an unsatisfactory condition. He complains in his letters of insomnia, nervousness and the throbbing sensations in his head, to which he often refers as "my apoplectic symptoms." At the end of April his depression became very apparent and he wrote to his brother Anatol:

"My nerves are altogether shaken." (26.)

We lead a monotonous existence, and are dreadfully bored, but for this very reason my health is first rate. The saline baths do me a deal of good, and, apart



from them, the way of living is excellent. I am very lazy, and have not the least desire to work. (30.)

I rush about like one possessed and never feel tired. (30.)

His constitution was so shaken and impaired by his nervous illness that at least a year's rest was necessary for his complete restoration. (Biog. 37.)

The condition of his health needed complete repose. (Biog. 37.)

His ideal of a summer residence, for which he longed as soon as the trees and fields began to show the first signs of green. (Biog. 30.)

Although the spring is still far off and the frosts are hardly over yet, I have already begun to think of the summer, and to long for the early spring sunshine, which always has such a good effect upon me. (30.)

These periods of hypochondria. All this winter I have been depressed to the verge of despair, and often wished myself dead. Now the spring is here the melancholy has vanished, but I know it will return in greater intensity with each winter to come, and so I have made up my mind to live away from Moscow all next year. (35.)

The few days spent here have done me a great deal of good. First, I have been able to work a little, so that my brother will take the second scene of the opera — not quite finished — back to Moscow with him. Secondly, I feel much better, although I was not very well yesterday. It is only a slight chill, however. (37.)

With the coming of spring Tchaikovsky's depression passed away, and he spent the Easter holidays very happily. (Biog. 37.)

On the point of taking leave of foreign lands and turning my face homewards, a sound, sane man, full of renewed strength and energy. (38.)

The sense of increased energy and strength, which always came to him in the lonely life of the country, was unknown in the bustle and stress of the city. (38.)

I know no greater happiness than to spend a few days quite alone in the country. (38.)

Wandered for whole days together in the forest,

spent the evenings on the low-lying steppe, and at night, sitting at my open window, I listened to the solemn stillness, which was only broken at rare intervals by some vague, indefinable sound. During this fortnight, without the least effort — just as though I were under the influence of some supernatural force — I sketched out the whole of *The Tempest* overture. (38.)

There came over me that feeling of intense delight which I so often experienced during my country rambles in Russia, and for which I have longed in vain since I have been here. I was alone in the solemn stillness of the woods. Such moments are wonderful, indescribable, not to be compared with any other experience. The indispensable condition is — solitude. I always like walking alone in the country. (38.)

I am feeling splendidly well. My physical health is first rate, my head clear and strong. I observe myself with delight and have come to the conclusion that I am now completely recovered. (38.)

Now I am quite recovered I ought to return to Russia to take up my duties at the Conservatoire and my old ways of life. (38.)

The fact that I profited by your wealth to travel abroad for my health's sake. (38.)

I am in a rose-colored mood. Glad the opera is finished, glad spring is at hand, glad I am well and free. (38.)

I am doing nothing whatever, only wandering through the forests and fields all day long. I want to take a change from my own work, with its eternal proof-correcting. (40.)

Throughout the whole year I have led a calm and cheerful life, and have been happy, so far as happiness is possible. (40.)

My mental condition was such that I had to collect myself first. What produces this terrible state? I do not understand it myself. . . . Everything has tended to make to-day go pleasantly, and yet I am so depressed, and have suffered so intensely, that I might envy any beggar in the street. It all lies in the fact that life is impossible for me, except in the

country or abroad. Why this is so, God knows — but I am simply on the verge of insanity. (42.)

It seems my lot to be always hurrying to finish something. I know this is equally bad for my nerves and my work, but I cannot control myself. I only rest when I am on a journey; that is why travelling has such a beneficial effect on my health. (43.)

After the terrible illness in 1877 he found in Kamenka, far more than in San Remo, Clarens or France, all he needed for his recovery; during these seven years, it was at Kamenka that he gathered force and recuperated for the life which was becoming infinitely more strenuous and many-sided. (Biog. 37 to 44.)

Wet or fine, Tchaikovsky always went for a walk after dinner. He had read somewhere that, in order to keep in health, a man ought to walk for two hours daily. He observed this rule with as much conscientiousness and superstition as though some terrible catastrophe would follow should he return five minutes too soon. (Biog. 45.)

Before supper, which was served at 8 p.m., Tchaikovsky always took another constitutional. (Biog. 45.)

The three months I spent abroad were lost time as regards work, but I feel I have gained in strength, and can now devote my whole time to it without exhausting myself. (46.)

If only I were twenty years younger!!! One thing is certain: my nerves are much stronger, and things which formerly were not to be thought of are now quite possible. Undoubtedly I owe this to my free life, relieved from all anxiety of earning my daily bread. (47.)

My health is not good. . . . In Carnival week I suffered from the most peculiar nervous headaches. . . . As I felt sure my accursed and shattered nerves were to blame, and I only wanted rest, I hurried into the country. (48.)

I find more and more delight in the cultivation of flowers, and comfort myself with the thought of devoting myself entirely to this occupation when my powers of composition begin to decay. (50.)

He was always fond of moving about. He could

not remain long in one spot. But this was chiefly because it always seemed to him that "Every place is better than the one in which we are." Paris, Kamenka, Clarens, Rome, Brailov, Simaki, Tiflis — all in turn were his favorite resorts, which he was delighted to visit and equally pleased to quit. But apart from the ultimate goal, traveling in itself was an enjoyment rather than a dread to Tchaikovsky. (Biog. 52.)

No sooner had he reached home again than he began planning yet another tour. It seemed as though he had become the victim of some blind force which drove him hither and thither at will. This power was not merely complaisance to the demands of others, nor his old passion for traveling, nor the fulfilment of a duty, nor yet the pursuit of applause; still less was it the outcome of a desire for material gain. This mysterious force had its source in an inexplicable, restless, despondent condition of mind, which sought appeasement in any kind of distraction. I cannot explain it as a premonition of his approaching death; there are no grounds whatever for such a supposition. Nor will I, in any case, take upon myself to solve the problem of my brother's last psychological development. (Biog. 52.)

All day long I wander in the forest and bring home quantities of mushrooms. (53.)

Many of his works were planned and his themes invented in these long rambles across country. (Mason.)

Without the key supplied by the oculist, any reader of the Life and Letters of Tchaikovsky must be as unable, as was his biographer, to explain the apparently insensate necessity for country life, journeys, concert tours, and travel over all the countries of Europe, with one trip to the United States. If, at least earlier in his life, he had made a trip to the United States solely to get a scientific pair of spectacles, I scarcely doubt that he might be living to-day. It was certainly not the love of music that caused



us to send for him, nor that motivated his own coming. The sorry account of his visit here would be ludicrous if it were not underlaid with tragedy for the composer, and shame for us. To those who have not learned that personal happiness depends upon the little and overlooked blunder or habit, it will appear ludicrous to say that the one thing which all Europe could not have given him, and which we alone were capable of giving him, would have been of infinitely more value to him than all the money, huzzas, interviewings, and advertising with which we prided ourselves in cursing him.

But resistance, reaction, recuperability, under long-continued "insults," and after unheeded warnings, are finally lost. This loss, as we have so often seen, is likely to fall in the period of presbyopia, when eyestrain is doubled, and the two misfortunes unite to bring about the final catastrophe. Without needless repetition and emphasis, it is particularly noteworthy that Tchaikovsky's maladies increased in intensity as he entered upon the presbyopic period, and they became more and more unendurable as he advanced in it. There is nothing more pathetic than the added poignancy of his cries with each year from thirty-eight to fifty, and it is most pitiable that when reaction is no more possible the old relief and happiness, once so evident, from country-life and journeying, no more returns:

I will not conceal it: all the poetry of country life and solitude has vanished. I do not know why. *Nowhere do I feel so miserable as at home.* If I do not work, I torment myself, am afraid of the future, etc. Is solitude really necessary to me? When I am in town, country life seems a paradise; when I am here, I feel no delight whatever. To-day, in particular, I am quite out of tune.

I am passing through a very enigmatical stage on my road to the grave. Something strange, which I cannot understand, is going on within me. A kind of life-weariness has come over me. Sometimes I feel an insane anguish, but not that kind of anguish which is the herald of a new tide of love for life, rather something hopeless, final, and — like every *finale* — a little commonplace. Simultaneously a passionate desire to create. The devil knows what it is. In fact, sometimes I feel my song is sung, and then again an unconquerable impulse, either to give it fresh life, or to start a new song. . . . As I have said, I do not know what has come to me. For instance, there was a time when I loved Italy and Florence. Now I have to make a great effort to emerge from my shell. When I do go out, I feel no pleasure whatever, either in the blue sky of Italy, in the sun that shines from it, in the architectural beauties I see around me, or in the teeming life of the streets. Formerly all this enchanted me, and quickened my imagination. Perhaps my trouble actually lies in those fifty years to which I shall attain two months hence, and my imagination will no longer take color from its surroundings. But enough of this! I am working hard. Whether what I am doing is really good is a question to which only posterity can give the answer. (50.)

This thought and experience gives significance to the awful and hopeless beauty of the Pathetic Symphony, the last and greatest of the composer's works. Mason asks:

. . . Has not disease, as well as health, its relations to our fortunes? . . . His mental temper, never bright, was shadowed with a pathological gloom throughout his life.

IN the majority of cases of severe eyestrain, past or present, the discerning oculist finds a curious result that may be too easily and thoughtlessly passed over. It is the inhibition of thought and normal mental action which comes from the

derouted and morbid ocular reflex. How frequently it is found that the sufferer sits staring with blank loss of power to concentrate his mind upon the task or the writing before him? There is a mysterious loss of imagination, an inability either to think or to execute. The intellect and creative faculty seem palsied. Tchaikovsky re-illustrates this inhibiting effect of ever-attempted but impossible ocular function:

I often sit for hours pen in hand, and have no idea how to begin my articles. I think I shall never hammer anything out; and afterwards people praise the fluency and ease of the writing! Remember what pains Zarembo's exercises cost me. Do you forget how in the summer of 1866 I worked my nerves to pieces over my First Symphony? And even now I often gnaw my nails to the quick, smoke any number of cigarettes and pace up and down my room for long before I can evolve a particular motive or theme. (35.)

I am very well pleased with my musical work. As regards the literary side of it, I believe it will cost me some days of my life. I cannot describe how it exhausts me. How many penholders I gnaw to pieces before a few lines grow perfect! How often I jump up in sheer despair because I cannot find a rhyme, or the meter goes wrong, or because I have absolutely no notion what this or that character would say at a particular moment. (39.)

I no longer compose anything — a sure indication of an agitated mind. (41.)

From November, 1880, until September, 1881, Tchaikovsky wrote nothing. (Biog. 41.)

Inspiration will not come; every day I begin something and lose heart. Then, instead of waiting for inspiration, I begin to be afraid lest I am played out, with the result that I am thoroughly dissatisfied with myself. And yet the conditions of life are satisfactory: wonderful scenery and the society of those I love. (43.)

I notice that the older I grow, the more trouble my orchestration gives me. I judge myself more severely, more critical with regard to light and shade. In such a case the country is a real boon. (47.)

I have been sitting all day over two pages, yet they will not come out as I wish. (53.)

Not only will the individual or special task "not get itself done," as Carlyle said, but any work whatsoever, and the life-work itself, is inhibited and frozen in the attempt, and the loss of inspiration is here, as frequently elsewhere, painfully deplored.

But work will not come back to me. Rome and Roman life are too characteristic, too exciting and full of variety, to permit of my sticking to my writing-table. However, I hope the power of work will gradually return. (39.)

Oh, my God, if I could only find strength and gladness of heart for new works! Just now I can only go on patching up the old ones. (37.)

I believe I shall never write anything good again. I am no longer in a condition to compose. (41.)

If I were young, this aversion from composition might be explained by the fact that I was gathering my forces, and would suddenly strike out some new path of my own making. But, alas! the years are beginning to tell. To write in a naive way, as the bird sings, is no longer possible, and I lack energy to invent something new. I do not tell you this because I hope for your encouraging denial, but simply as a fact. I do not regret it. I have worked much in my time, in a desultory way, and now I am tired. It is time to rest. (42.)

Formerly I wrote as easily, and as much in obedience to the law of nature, as a fish swims in water or a bird flies. Now I am like a man who carries a precious but heavy burden, and who must bear it to the last at any cost. I, too, shall bear mine to the end, but sometimes I fear my strength is broken and I shall be forced to cry halt! (42.)



Annoyed with my failures. Very dissatisfied because everything that comes into my head is so commonplace. Am I played out? (44.)

No impulse for creative work. What does this mean? Have I written myself out? No ideas, no inclination? Still I am hoping gradually to collect material for a symphony. (48.)

Am I done for and dried up? Perhaps there is yet some subject which could inspire me; but I ought to compose no more absolute music, symphony or chamber works. To live without work would weary me. What am I to do? Fold my hands as far as composition is concerned and try to forget it? It is difficult to decide. I think, and think, and do not know how to settle the question. In any case, the outlook has not been cheerful the last three days. (52.)

When he should have been at the acme of his creative power, he gave his best energies and care to a work which was at once recognized as without inspiration. He had hammered it out of a weary and inhibited and morbid brain, and he could not himself understand the reason of its ill success:

From the press I have encountered such hatred and hostility, that, even now, I cannot account for it. On no other opera have I expended so much labor as sacrifice; yet never before have I been so persecuted by the critics. (47.)

It is an undoubted *fiasco*. This failure has wounded me in my inmost soul, for I never worked with greater ardor than at *The Enchantress*. (47.)

The reason for the failure of *The Enchantress* must be sought elsewhere; possibly in the defective interpretation of both the chief parts; but more probably in the qualities of the music, which still awaits its just evaluation at the hands of a competent critic. (Biog. 47.)

In cases of severe eyestrain, whether in private practice, or as gleaned from the biographies of men and women of genius, one of the most appall-

ing symptoms frequently found is hopelessness, despair, intense mental suffering, an irresistible feeling that life is worthless, and, although young, soon to come to an end. In Tchaikovsky's case, as was true in that of many others, it once reached the suicidal impulse. There are few minds than can sanely and successfully resist the lifelong insistence and maddening tendencies of continuous agonizing and mysterious disease. Note the age at which this despair occurs:

I cannot shake off the conviction that I shall not live long, and shall leave my symphony unfinished. (26.)

I am already very tired of life. (27.)

Tchaikovsky never gives the true reason for his yearning after solitude and a life of "heavenly quiet and serenity," but it certainly did not proceed from "misanthropy," "indolence" or weariness of life. (Biog. 27.)

What comes of it all? I am old and can enjoy nothing more. I live on my memories and my hopes. But what is there to hope for? (32.)

Boredom consumes us all, and the reason is that we are growing old. Yes, it is useless to conceal that every moment brings us nearer to the grave. (32.)

Misanthropical feeling comes over me, which has often happened before. It comes partly from my nerves, which sometimes get out of gear for no particular reason, and partly from the rather uncertain fate of my compositions. (32.)

The things which once seemed to him new and interesting now appeared more and more wearisome and unprofitable, and his moods of depression became more frequent, more intense, and of longer duration. (Biog. 33.)

You write of being out of spirits. Believe me, I am the same. (35.)

I am overcome by a sense of loneliness, of desolation. (35.)

In my life, too, there are days, hours, weeks, nay, and months, in which everything looks black, when I

am tormented by the thought that I am forsaken, that no one cares for me. Indeed, my life is of little worth to any one. Were I to vanish from the face of the earth to-day, it would be no great loss to Russian music, and would certainly cause no one great unhappiness. (36.)

In March and April he began to suffer again from mental depression. (37.)

The fact that we both suffer from the same malady would alone suffice to draw us together. This malady is misanthropy; but a peculiar form of misanthropy, which certainly does not spring from hatred or contempt for mankind. (37.)

At my age when one has nothing more to hope in the future. (44.)

After convalescence, which had lasted seven years, Tchaikovsky returned to all these activities with vigor and enjoyment, although after a time his courage flagged and all his strength of will had to be requisitioned to enable him to "keep up this sort of existence." Enthusiasm waned and there succeeded — in his own words — "a life-weariness, and at times an insane depression; something hopeless, despairing and final — and (as in every *finale*) a sense of triviality." (Biog. 44.)

Overcome with insane depression. (46.)

I sit at home full of remorse. The cause of my remorse is this: life is passing away and draws near to its end, and yet I have not fathomed it. (47.)

My absent-mindedness is becoming almost unbearable, and is a sign of advancing age. However, every one was surprised to learn that I was only fifty-one yesterday. Carnegie especially was very much astonished. They all thought, except those who knew something of my life, that I was much older. Probably I have aged very much in the last few years. I feel I have lost vitality. (51.)

I must confess to a morbid fear and horror, as though I were entering the kingdom of the dead and the world of those who had long since vanished. (52.)

. . . He says that had he remained a day longer in Moscow he should have drowned himself, and it

is said that he did go so far, in his terrible depression, as to stand up to his chest in the river one frosty September night, "in the hope of literally catching his death of cold, and getting rid of his trouble without scandal." (Mason.)

Readers of the clinical biographies of other eyestrain sufferers have noticed the repeated occurrence of the fact that these so often have been compelled to work at a "white heat," with an intensity of emotion and recklessness of result that was itself morbid, and a certain indication of an underlying morbid cause. It was only thus that the nervous mechanism could be whipped and spurred to overcome the resistances and inhibitions of the balking mechanism of eye and brain. Again the case of Tchaikovsky illustrates:

I should feel quite happy and contented here, were it not for the morbid, restless need of hurrying on my work, which tires me dreadfully, without being in the least necessary. (43.)

In any case my mental condition has been very gloomy of late. The composition of the *Manfred* Symphony—a work highly tragic in character—is so difficult and complicated that at times I myself become a Manfred. All the same, I am consumed with the desire to finish it as soon as possible, and am straining every nerve: result,—extreme exhaustion. This is the eternal *cercle vicieux* in which I am forever turning without finding an issue. If I have no work, I worry and bore myself; when I have it, I work far beyond my strength. (45.)

There are times when it seems to me it would be wise to cease from composing for a while; to travel and rest. But an unconquerable desire for work gains the upper hand and chains me to my desk and piano. (45.)

I cannot live without work, but why do circumstances always compel me to be in a hurry, to have to overtax my strength? (47.)



In the old — not the modern — text-books on “migraine,” and in the case of every patient who has long endured this disease, it is noticed that there is a seeming contradiction of health and happiness almost synchronously, or quickly alternating, with the deepest agony and dejection. The following excerpts show the symptom reappearing in Tchaikovsky’s case:

I have suffered all the winter, but my physical health is not in the least impaired. (35.)

More and more misanthropical. Imagine, now-a-days, I am often drawn towards my monastic life, or something similar. Do not fancy I am physically out of health. I am quite well, sleep well, eat even better. (35.)

Forgive me, dear friend, for boring you with these continual complaints about my health, which are out of place, for in reality I am a perfectly sound man, and the little ailments about which I grumble are not serious. (38.)

A splitting headache, and spent a wretched night. I recovered during the return journey to Petersburg, and to-day I feel quite refreshed. (39.)

My health is better. I have gone through such a terrible attack of nervous headache, I thought I must have died. I fell asleep so worn out, I had not even strength to undress. When I awoke I was well. (43.)

He was no longer a misanthropist, rather he sought those to whom he was dear, not only as a man, but as a personage. (44.)

When I am quite well — as I am at present — I am seized with a feverish thirst for work, but the thought of the shortness of human life paralyzes all my energy. (46.)

I was ill again after my last letter to you. This time I was so bad that I decided to send for the doctor. It seemed to me that I was about to have a strange illness. Suddenly I received a telegram saying that I must be at the rehearsal. I answered that the rehearsal was not to be thought of, for I could not

travel. But at the end of half an hour I suddenly felt so well that — in spite of terrible disinclination — I went to Moscow. Every trace of headache, which for ten days had so affected me, vanished. Is not this a curious pathological case? (46.)

Complete success. Great enjoyment — but still, why this drop of gall in my honey-pot. (47.)

In this question lie the germs of that weariness and suffering which had their growth in Tchaikovsky's soul simultaneously with his pursuit of fame, and reached their greatest intensity in the moment of the composer's greatest triumphs. (Biog. 47.)

The work went easily, and his health was good. (51.)

Increasing nostalgia and depression of spirits. (52.)

I was taken so ill in the carriage that I frightened my fellow-passengers by becoming delirious, and had to stop at Khartov. After taking my usual remedies and a long sleep, I awoke quite well in the morning. (52.)

This year, 1893, opened with a period of serene content, for which the creation of his Sixth, or so-called "Pathetic," Symphony was mainly accountable. The composition of this work seems to have been an act of exorcism, whereby he cast out all the dark spirits which had possessed him in the preceding years. (Biog. 52.)

At this time he suffered from a terrible attack of headache, which never left him, and threatened to become a chronic ailment. It departed, however, with extraordinary suddenness on the fourteenth day after the first paroxysm. (52.)

In spite of the discomfiting news which met him in all directions, from the time of his return from England to the end of his life, Tchaikovsky was as serene and cheerful as at any period in his existence. (Biog. 53.)

I was very ill. (53.)

Just lately I have been dreadfully bored and misanthropical. I do not know why. I sit in my room and see no one but the waiter. I long for home, work and my normal existence. (53.)

He had never felt better or happier in his life. (*Kashkin*, 53.)

That the case of Tchaikovsky may in most of its phases illustrate the clinical picture of "migraine," as described by the careful observers of a past (not present) generation, one must add the frequently observed symptom of partial paralyses, or pareses:

At this time he was suffering from a nervous affection of the right hand, which made conducting a matter of considerable difficulty. (Biog. 51.)

In America the news that I could not go, because my right hand was disabled, reached them by cable, and they were very much upset. Now they are awaiting an answer — yes or no. (51.)

Yesterday I suffered so much that I could neither sleep nor eat, which is very unusual for me. I suffer not only from torments which cannot be put into words (there is one place in my new symphony — the Sixth — where they seem to me adequately expressed), but from a dislike to strangers and an indefinable terror — though of what the devil only knows. This state makes itself felt by internal pains and loss of power in my legs. However, it is for the last time in my life. (53.)

There is also found the usual phenomenon that the eyes, the original source of the entire train of reflex symptoms, only rarely show painful signs of the disease, and these but temporarily.

Another unpleasant experience took the form of an obstinate affection of the eyes, which hindered him from working regularly. (25.)

In spite of his eyes being affected and his constant change of quarters. (25.)

My health is good: only one thing troubles me a little — my eyesight, which is tried by my work. It is so much weaker than formerly that I have been obliged to get a pair of eyeglasses, which I am told are very becoming to me. (32.)

There are ninety-nine cases of atypical "migraine" to one that some writers call "typical." I have omitted many references and others have been given in previous pages, to the complaint of headaches, neuralgia, neuralgic headaches, etc., scattered through the letters and life of Tchaikovsky. Severe eyestrain will usually result in some form of cerebral disorder or ache, or in "bad digestion," "dyspepsia," "catarrh of the stomach," etc. The latter class of disorders are persistently complained of by Tchaikovsky. For instance:

Suffering from a form of dyspepsia. (37.)

I wish some one could explain to me the origin of that curious exhaustion which comes upon me almost every evening, about which I have already written to you. I cannot say it is altogether disagreeable, because it usually ends in a heavy, almost lethargic sleep, and such repose is bliss. Nevertheless the attacks are tiresome and unpleasant, because of the vague anxiety, the undefinable yearning, which take an inconceivably strong hold upon my spirit, and end in a positive longing for Nirvana — *la soif du neant*. Probably the cause of this psychological phenomenon is of quite a prosaic nature; I think it is not so much a mental ailment as a result of bad digestion, a sequel of my catarrh of the stomach. Unluckily we cannot get over the fact that the material influences the spiritual! (38.)

In spite of the greatest care and moderation, I suffer from dyspepsia. It is not serious, and I have no doubt a cure at Vichy will completely set me up. (49.)

One wonders if a certain number of cases of alcoholic dissipation are not being constantly caused by the nervous disorders and irritations due to eyestrain. The note is not wanting in Tchaikovsky's case.



Since the day you left I have taken several glasses of brandy at night, and during the day I drink a good deal. I cannot do without it. I never feel calm except when I have taken a little too much. I have accustomed myself so much to this secret tipping that I feel a kind of joy at the sight of the bottle I keep near me. I can only write my letters after a nip. This is a proof that I am still out of health. (38.)

A careless or prejudiced critic might think that Tchaikovsky's melancholy and ill-health were largely due to his ill success in life and as a musician. The following excerpts will answer:

The people around me often wonder at my taciturnity and my apparent ill-temper, while actually I do not lead an unhappy existence. What more can a man want whose prospects are good, who is liked, and whose artistic work meets with appreciation? (27.)

I assert that life is beautiful in spite of everything! This "everything" includes the following items: Illness; I am getting much too stout; and my nerves are all to pieces. (30.)

He realized his wildest dreams of fame, and attained to such prosperity and universal honor as rarely fall to the lot of an artist during his lifetime. (Biog. 47.)

Physically neither better nor worse than in former years, possessing the unlimited affections of those whom he loved in return, — he was, to all appearance, an example of mortal happiness, yet in reality he was less happy than before. (Biog. 47.)

And this regret grew keener, as his weariness grew more intolerable. The more he accustomed his temperament to unsuitable occupations, the further he advanced his reputation, the more complete was his disenchantment with the prize. Radiant and glittering as it had appeared from afar, seen closer, it proved insignificant and tarnished. Hence the profound disillusionment, "the insane depression," the something "hopeless and final" which make so dark a background to the picture of his brilliant success at home and abroad. (Biog. 47.)

That the nonsensical word, *hysteria*, may not be used, Tchaikovsky replied in advance:

To my regret, however, you seem to see what is good for me precisely where I — and several others — see what is inimical to my health; in the very thing which appears to me an unprofitable and aimless exertion. . . . All you have written to me, and also your manner of saying it, only proves *how little you know me*, as I have frequently observed on former occasions. Possibly you may be right, and I am only *putting it on*; but that is precisely the nature of my illness. (38.)

Another ancient and humorous superstition had also to be illustrated:

His first impressions of Vichy, whither he had been ordered by his physician, were far from favorable, but the local physician persuaded him to remain at least long enough for a "demi-cure," from which he derived great benefit. (35.)

Tchaikovsky now resembled those individuals who do not recognize the true cause of their sufferings, and, therefore, have recourse to the wrong treatment. (Biog. 35.)

The sole object of the journey mentioned in this letter was to take a cure at Vichy. The catarrh of the stomach from which he suffered had been a trouble to Tchaikovsky for the last twenty years.<sup>2</sup> Once, while staying with Kondratiev at Nizy, the local doctor had recommended him *Natron* water. From that time he could not exist without it, and took it in such quantities that he ended by acquiring a kind of taste for it. But it did not cure his complaint, which grew worse and worse, so that in 1876 he had to undergo a course of mineral waters. The catarrhal trouble was not entirely cured, however, but returned at intervals with more or less intensity. About the

<sup>2</sup> "Who has not seen correction of errors of refraction relieve so-called bilious attacks, periodical vomiting, anorexia, indigestion and other gastric symptoms?" Prof. John H. Musser, Jour. Am. Med. Assoc., Nov. 4, 1905.

end of the eighties his condition grew worse. Once during the rehearsals for *Pique Dame*, while staying at the Hotel Rossiya, in St. Petersburg, he sent for his brother Modeste, and declared he "could not live through the night." This turned his thoughts more and more to the "hateful but health-giving Vichy." But the periods of rest after his various tours, and of work in his "hermit's cave," at Klin, were so dear to him that until 1892 he could not make up his mind to revisit this watering place. This year he only decided to go because the health of Vladimir Davidov equally demanded a cure at Vichy. He hoped in this congenial company to escape his usual homesickness, and that it might even prove a pleasure to take his nephew abroad. (Biog. 52.)

To complete the sketch these paragraphs may be added:

"I was shocked at his appearance," he writes, "for he had aged so much that I only recognized him by his wonderful blue eyes. A man old at fifty! His delicate constitution had suffered terribly from his incessant creative work." (Door, 51.)

But this was probably the fatal moment in his indisposition, for, while talking, he poured out a glass of water and drank a long draught. The water had not been boiled, and they were dismayed at his imprudence. But he was not in the least alarmed, and tried to calm their fears. He dreaded cholera less than any other illness. After this his condition grew worse, but he attributed all his discomfort to a copious dose of Hunyadi which he had taken earlier in the day, and still declined to send for his favorite doctor, Bertenson. (Biog. 53.)

Death occurred on Oct. 25 (Nov. 6), at the age of fifty-three.

And why this death at the age of fifty-three? It is not an explanation to say that it was due to cholera, even if one admits the correctness of the pretty evidently false diagnosis. This feeling is expressed by his brother, who wrote:

As at the beginning of the sixties, when he chose a musical career, and in 1885, when he resolved to "show himself in the eyes of the world," so also at this juncture, we are conscious of a feeling *that things could not have gone on much longer*. (Biog. 52.)

His death, which came to solve the problem, seemed fortuitous. Yet it is clear to me that it came at a moment *when things could not have gone on much longer*; nor can I shake off the impression that the years 1892 and 1893 were the dark harbingers of a new and serene epoch. (Biog. 52.)

Despite the smiles of the neurologists, or diagnosticians who care not for the forty years of functional disease which preceded anatomic pathology, or the irresistible impact of infectious disease, the explanation of Tchaikovsky's death lies in the lifelong preparation of the "soil" by eyestrain, doubled now by presbyopia. The lethal diseases are in truth often but the executioners of long precedent functional disorders. Imitating a foolish science, his biographer explains the life disorder by the ancient but still living superstition of "heredity":

His one certain inheritance seems to have been an abnormally neurotic tendency, which probably came to him through his grandfather Assier, who suffered from epilepsy.

His grandfather was an epileptic, and his own symptoms pointed to an inherited nervous irritability. (Mason.)

Tchaikovsky also echoed the nonsense that still spooks about the professional and biographic mind:

My nerves are poor, but this cannot be helped, and is not of much consequence. Whose nerves are not disordered in our generation — especially among our artists?. (32.)



If this theory seems to the unobservant to have some ground when applied to musicians and literary workers, it may be suggested that no sign of "nerves" and "migraine" is found in Brahms, Mozart, Verdi, Mendelssohn, Goethe, Mommsen, Gladstone, and thousands of others in similar callings. Then the sculptors and painters and actors are also "artists," and one will seek almost in vain for the symptoms of eyestrain in these three classes of men.

In the midst of the perplexity, mystery and pain of his life, like Parkman, Carlyle and the majority of such sufferers, Tchaikovsky was struck with the tormenting puzzle of the nature of his life ailment, and he wrote as follows:

Dear friend, leading such a life, amid all these beautiful impressions of nature and art, ought not a man to be happy? And yet a worm continually gnaws in secret at my heart. I sleep badly, and do not feel that courage and freshness which I might expect under the present conditions. Only for a moment can I conquer my mental depression. My God! What an incomprehensible and complicated machine the human organism is! We shall never solve the various phenomena of our spiritual and material existence. And how can we draw the line between the intellectual and physiological phenomena of our life? At times it seems to me as though I suffered from a mysterious but purely physical malady which influences my mental phases. Lately I have thought my heart was out of order; but then I remembered that last summer the doctor who examined it declared my heart to be absolutely sound. So I must lay the blame on my nerves—but what are nerves? Why, on one and the same day, without any apparent reason, do they act quite normally for a time, and then lose their elasticity and energy, and leave one incapable of work and insensible to artistic impressions? These are riddles. (40.)

This is a genuinely scientific questioning, and millions of other sufferers in the last and in the present generation might have found the easy and simple key to the mystery, an easy and now well-known solution of the "riddles," and the relief of their torments, if the medical profession had exhibited the same or a slightly better logical and clinical acumen.